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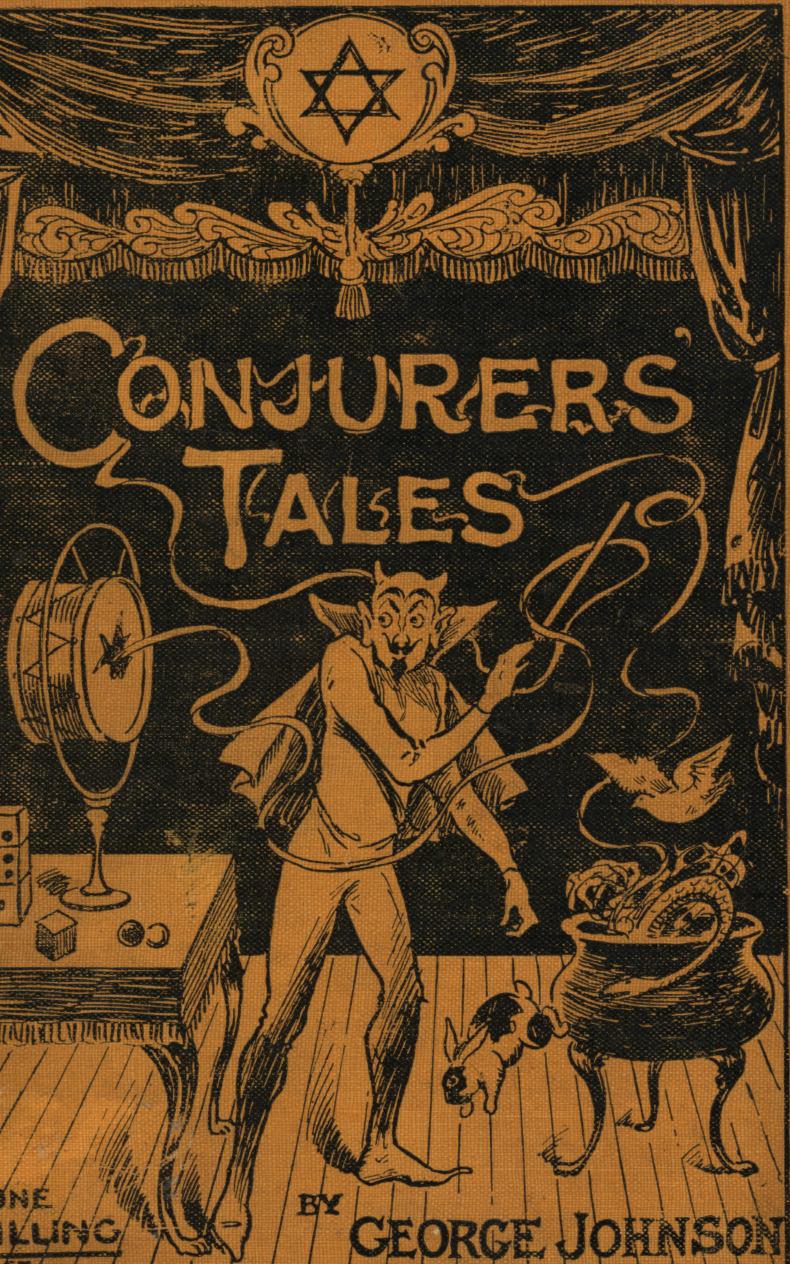

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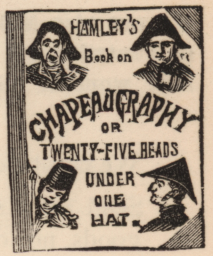

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PREFACE.

In presenting these few tales—tales of those whose good or ill fortune it may be to seldom have their stories told in print—it is perhaps as well to state, that whatever the verdict of a much enduring public, in these narratives the balance of fact outweighs the fiction.

The writer is indebted to the Editor of *The Magician*—Mr. Will Goldston, Messrs. A. W. Gamage, Ltd., and *The Magician, Ltd.*, for their courtesy in permitting the inclusion of the stories: "Professor Swankton's Ruse," "The Bigger Man," and "The Spirit of the Still."

GEORGE JOHNSON.

Plymouth,
September, 1910.

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"OF course, it looks all right on paper," said Kircher to his chief assistant, Tom Wells. "All these illusions are absolutely great until you go and investigate ; then they generally turn out either quite unpractical or else just a re-hash of someone else's idea."

Knowing that they were in want of something to brighten up the show, which, though successful enough, had been running for some time, and would be the better for the introduction of a little novelty, Wells had called his employer's attention to an advertisement in "The Era." "A genuine novelty," it read, "The Spirit of the Still. Conjurers and Illusionists on the look-out for something new, please write for particulars, Carder, 89, Cliftonville Road, Watford."

"You might have a look at it, anyway," suggested Wells, "we shall, I suppose, be in town the week after next ; I believe you said that we were not booked then ?"

"No, we are not, worse luck," replied the conjurer; "as you say, perhaps it is worth investigating, so I will run down and see this spirit of Mr. Carder, or whatever it is, when we get back."

In the course of events, Kircher went to Watford after the company's return to London, and discovered Mr. Carder busily engaged at a wood turning lathe, forming sundry pieces of boxwood into certain mysterious caskets and puzzles beloved by school-boy conjurers. He was a quaint old gentleman, with a goatee beard, wearing a tightly fitting black velvet cap, and a pair of spectacles, through which latter he blinked at everything and everybody. "You have come to see my illusion?" he said interrogatively; "If you will be kind enough to sit down for a minute or two while I finish off this piece of work, I will explain the trick, which I think you will admit is quite original."

Kircher, with some difficulty discovering a chair without a back, amidst the shavings and general litter of the workshop, prepared to listen to the unfolding of the mystery. The old man, who proved quite a character, rambled away about the slackness of business, the chief trouble being that, though at one time he had the field almost to himself, the proprietors of toy shops and "Bazaars" were now getting many of his particular specialities from Germany, and in consequence there were times when he found it difficult to make both ends meet. These were, of course, items

of considerable moment to Mr. Carder, but to Kircher, who had later on an appointment with his agent, they proved rather tedious, so he ventured again to introduce the subject of the Illusion. Carder was full of apologies. "I will show you the model at once," he said, as hastily deserting the treadle, he stepped into an adjoining room, and returned with what at first glance appeared to be some highly scientific chemical apparatus, but a part of which proved, on closer inspection, to be an excellent imitation of a spirit still. Carder proceeded to explain.

"You see, here we have a model spirit still or rectifier, and a vat," he said, "which in the ordinary course of things would contain the alcohol, after it has risen from this kettle-shaped arrangement with the large copper head. The vat, you will notice, is not made of wood but glass, surrounded by bands of plated metal. When the full-sized illusion is built the latter will be made of celluloid, and in two halves, so that the vat or receiver will come apart for convenience in packing."

The illusion-maker offered no objection to Kircher examining everything, and excepting that from a cursory inspection the still appeared a trifle shallow for its external dimensions, there did not seem room for much trickery. Having satisfied himself that there was nothing in either portion of the apparatus, Kircher at the request of the old man betook himself to the

chair again, while the arrangement was being set up. Everything being in readiness, water was poured in the still, and a large spirit lamp was lit and placed beneath. In a few moments steam, or more correctly speaking, water vapour began to condense on the sides of the vat, and in a very short time it became quite impossible to see through the glass.

"Everything all right so far?" enquired Carder, who after lighting the lamp had not approached the apparatus. Kircher had noticed nothing and said as much. "Well then, will you be good enough to look into the vat?" The magician complied with the request, and although the container was fairly filled with vapour, it was possible to see that it was otherwise empty.

At this moment Carder fired a small revolver behind his back.

Kircher was startled for a moment and slightly annoyed. "That's rubbish," he said, "we're not on the stage just now, and anyhow if you thought that would cause me to look away, you were mistaken."

"I beg your pardon," said the old man demurely, "but it is part of the *mis-en-scene*; would you please make quite sure that the receiver is still empty?"

Kircher was about to again approach, when Carder laid a hand on his arm. "Never mind," he said, "I don't want to startle you a second time, and perhaps you are not fond of animals." "Up, Jack!" and a small fox terrier leapt from the container with

every token of joy at being released from an uncomfortable lodging!

"Well I'm——!" was the remark of the really surprised conjurer, at which Carder chuckled. "No," he said, "I didn't invent 'Well I'm——,'* but I think "The Spirit of the Still" is one better. You will of course understand that my dog is only what I may call a lay figure, though a pretty lively one I can assure you; when the illusion is presented in public, a lady will represent the Spirit as a matter of course."

Kircher had a sharp eye for a good thing, and this, he concluded, would be a big draw, so negotiations were entered into forthwith. The old man having explained the illusion, Carder agreed to deliver it ready for presentation at Burington in four weeks, where Kircher was booked to appear; and the financial arrangements being completed, the conjurer returned to town.

"This is going to be a snip," he gleefully remarked to Tom Wells at their next meeting; "we must see about getting some bills out." The illusion is on an entirely new principle and is bound to go well."

"Traps?" queried the assistant laconically.

"Never mind how it works for the present," was the reply; "I tell you it is really new, and if it will comfort your inquiring soul at all, I may say there are *no* traps"; and Wells did not press the matter further.

* A Famous Illusion.

Kircher and his company, not being booked for the end of the week preceding their appearance in Burington, the former decided to spend two or three days there, rehearsing the new illusion. On arrival, there was no sign of it at the hall, so Kircher wired to Watford, "Hurry up with your spirits, want to get everything ready," giving the address of his private apartments. In less than an hour a reply came, "Still left yesterday, vat nearly finished, follows to-morrow, certain. Carder." These two simple telegrams were the starting-point of worry and trouble, which, though lasting only three days, Kircher and his company are likely to remember for all time.

The Magician's first intimation of anything being wrong came from his landlady. "There are two men waiting to see you, sir," she said; "I told them that you were just having lunch, and asked them to call later, but they won't go away."

With a muttered anathema, for Kircher after a morning's work at the hall happened to be hungry, he entered the passage. "Well, what can I do for you?" he asked abruptly.

"Are you Mr. Kircher?" enquired the elder of the two, and on receiving a reply in the affirmative they proceeded to explain that they were Inland Revenue officers, and that from information received they learnt that Kircher was expecting a still from a certain man named Carder, residing at Watford. Enquiries having been made at that place,

it was found that the person living at the address from which the still had been sent, was not the licensed holder of one; further, that as far as they were aware, neither was Kircher, and therefore their instructions were to take possession of the still at the first opportunity, and that, in the meantime, they proposed sticking to the conjurer closer than a brother.

Kircher's first inclination was to attempt the forcible ejectment of the two officers into the street, but being single handed, and remembering also that they represented the law, a wiser course prevailed. "I don't know what mare's nest you think you have dropped across," he said, "but I can assure you that your people are making an idiotic mistake. It is true I have something in the form of a still coming from Watford, but it is for an illusion. I am a conjurer, and as you may have noticed, there are bills posted in the town announcing the production of an illusion on Monday next, under the title "The Spirit of the Still." Where you obtained your information I do not know, and ——"

"Oh, that has nothing to do with the case," interrupted the officer who had first spoken, "the point is that the boiler and head portion of a genuine spirit still has been sent off addressed to you; we have not been able up to the present to trace the 'worm' part, but if you have any information concerning it, I advise you in your own interest to tell us where it is."

By this time Kircher was in a state of boiling rage. "Hang your asinine interference," he said, "and your worms as well! Look here, I have no further time to waste and I want the illusion for rehearsals, so I will wire to the maker, who will perhaps satisfy you."

The powers of the Inland Revenue offered no objection to this, provided that they themselves despatched the message. Kircher agreed and telegraphed to Carder, "The Revenue authorities here say you have sent me a genuine spirit still, please contradict."

Kircher was then permitted to finish his lunch in peace, and by that time the reply arrived, "Still itself is genuine, but slightly faked. People here enquiring also, what's the matter?" The officers smiled, and the conjurer metaphorically tore his hair.

"Oh, let us get to the hall," he said desperately, "the things will come there and you can look at everything." Nothing however had arrived, and in reply to another telegram, Carder wired, "Revenue authorities seized still at goods station. Don't know what to do; letter follows." Later in the day the vat portion of the apparatus arrived, but in this affair the Revenue people took little interest, merely satisfying themselves that the "worm," or spiral cooling tube that they were so keen about, was not contained in the package.

Next morning a letter arrived from Carder;

"Dear Sir," it ran, "I am very sorry that you should be caused all this trouble; as you know, the still portion of the apparatus, except for the little vapour arrangement, was, in the model, to all intents and purposes a genuine article. I was fortunate enough (as I thought) to obtain from a marine store dealer a large copper still, which he had purchased for old metal. Some busybody must have seen this being delivered at my house, and at once run away with the idea that I was about to make spirits on a large scale. I can only hope that if you show this letter to the Revenue people they may take a reasonable view of the matter, but I regret that up to the present I have neither been able to gain possession of the apparatus, nor get it sent on to you."

On receipt of this, the harassed conjurer set out for the Revenue Office, and obtained an interview with the Surveyor. Fortunately for Kircher, that officer was a person able to look at the humorous side of things. "It is a great pity, Mr. Kircher," he said, "that your illusion-maker had anything to do with this still. No one is permitted to keep a spirit still excepting a distiller, but I will arrange that this one shall come here and we will see what can be done."

The Surveyor was as good as his word, and later in the day, preceding the opening performance, the missing portion of the apparatus was unpacked.

Kircher, having pointed out that it was impossible

to produce spirits—of an alcoholic nature—was at last permitted to put on the illusion, which created a great effect.

Though the Spirit often makes its appearance on Kircher's programme, appearing in the mysterious vat, amidst clouds of vapour, the said vapour does not come from the old still. That, from "advice received," went back again to a marine store, very much in the state of scrap metal Those witnessing the illusion now will see a very gaudy still, all brass and glitter, from the front, but a hollow sham from behind. It now and again faces an expert in the manufacture of alcohol, but more often experts in the sampling thereof. The former laughs as he recalls the story, which circulated through the length and breadth of Revenue officialdom; but the sampling experts just applaud Kircher's wonderful illusion, which, as that gentleman argues, is the main thing after all.

The Bigger Man.

"NINE shillings and sevenpence!" The Professor again counted the money, mostly coppers, handed him by the check-taker, baggage man, fly poster, and general factotum to Ede's Grand Palace of Magic.

"Nine and sevenpence!" Two hours' work was over. The last member of the scanty audience, still grinning at the conjurer's parting wheeze, had trudged from the portable theatre into the slush and rain of a November night. The canvas roofing flapped in the wind, while a single naptha lamp flared fitfully over the diminutive stage; as Ede, slipping on a threadbare ulster, covering an equally threadbare evening dress, prepared to close for the night.

Business was bad. "Hurdin's" big show and huge posters had for weeks dogged the footsteps of the smaller man. Not that the magicians had actually clashed, but at most of the little outlying townships visited by Ede, a branch line had carried holiday folk to the larger places where Hurdin was performing. Hurdin did nothing by halves; wherever he performed towns and villages, within ten miles or so, were decked with bills. "Hurdin the Great!" "Hurdin the inimitable Magician!" and after all, half-day tickets were cheap, and folk argued that if they were going to see a conjuring entertainment, they might as well see it at a Hall in comfort—and comfort was a commodity

that the hard benches of "Ede's Grand Palace of Magic" had little to offer. The naptha flare was extinguished, and padlocking the only entrance, Ede traversed the hundred yards or so that separated the the portable theatre from the George Inn, where a wife and a sick child awaited.

The hostlery was closing for the night, and courteously but firmly waving aside the offer of "Something to keep the damp out, Professor," offered by the good-natured yokels who were tumbling out, the conjurer climbing the stairs entered a bedroom.

The furniture, like the fire, was meagre; on the latter the contents of an enamelled saucepan bubbled, emitting an appetising odour, but the magician heeded neither. His eyes sought the smaller of two beds on which lay the form of a pretty fair haired child. "How's the kid?" Half hopefully, but with a tinge of sadness, the question was put to a woman with the same fair hair, whose tired eyes, that seemed weary of watching, turned as the door opened. "Much the same Joe; that young doctor has been here again to-night, but he didn't stop long. He says that we must see that she gets good nursing and good food now, or"—with a stifled sigh—"we won't have Ness with us for very long."—What are the takings?"

Ede, sad at heart, dropped a canvas bag on the table. "Just enough to clear us out of here, with the receipts of the last two nights added," he said. "Heaven knows what we are to be up to next. I

know Hurdin goes on to Driffield the day after to-morrow, and Watton is only fifteen miles away. It's no use trying to show there—I'm sick of it all."

The wife crossed the room to where her husband stood. "Joe," she said, "Don't you think the doctor could do something for us?" You know——"

"Yes, I know," replied Ede, "he's a good sort: what a conjurer he would have made! He came round after the show last night, and you should have seen him handle the cards, why he even showed me a thing or two! But he's poor—poor as a church mouse, and"—sadly—"almost as badly off as we are."

"Yes, Joe, but Ness—he seemed so sympathetic to-night, and——" The child stirred uneasily in her sleep and a small drowsy voice came from the bed—"It's a lady's watch, a silver one, it was made in Switzerland; why part of the hour hand is broken! and—oh mother, I'm so thirsty!" With an anxious start Ede hastened to the bedside. "Oh Kid, Kid, and I thought you were so much better!" "It's all right dad, I was only dreaming"—with a wan little smile—"Was I going through the business again? Dad dear, I feel so tired."

The mother hurried forward with a cooling draught while the conjurer, sinking into a chair, gazed moodily into the dying embers of the fire. "See that she gets good nursing and good food." Yes! he knew that right well, but how?

The show was not so good as it had been, the

clairvoyance business, worked with that degree of finish to which Ede—with the help of his daughter—had brought it, was *the* draw. It had brought good houses, and would again. But Ness had fallen sick, and the takings had grown less and less.

Only a week ago his child had seemed at death's door, but the crisis had passed, and now—as the doctor said—it was imperative that she received more nursing and attention than the conjurer and his wife could possibly give in their nomadic life.

"Will you have some supper, Joe?" It was the wife who, having soothed the invalid, now busied herself arranging the meal; but Ede, with "Thanks, old girl, I'm not hungry," lit his pipe and pulled at it savagely.

* * *

Dr. HAMILTON, SELTON, YORKS.—The great and only Hurdin read the visiting card just handed to him by the hall-keeper, who, puffing and grumbling at being interrupted at his job of switching out lights for the night, stood waiting in the corridor leading to the dressing rooms.

"Don't know him! Another enthusiastic amateur, I suppose, wants to learn the whole programme and be able to give it himself in about a week! Well, show him up."

A slightly built, good looking young fellow, carrying a soft tweed hat, entered the dressing-room,

and met the half tired, half cynical gaze of the great magician.

"Dr. Hamilton, I believe? It's rather late, sir—if your business is not pressing, perhaps you would not mind looking me up to-morrow, I ——" The young doctor deprecatingly waved aside the interrogation. "I come on a matter that I am afraid will admit of little delay," he said. "I had the pleasure of witnessing the latter half of your performance, but would have seen you earlier were it possible;" and, plunging at once into the matter in hand, he related the predicament of Ede and his family.

For half-an-hour they talked: talked until the chauffeur, waiting in the rain with Hurdin's forty-horse-power Limousine-bodied motor, had for the twentieth time metaphorically consigned his master to the demons, with whom he appeared on such familiar terms.

At length, Hurdin and the doctor emerged from the stage door, the former remarking, as they entered the car, "It's too late for you to get back to-night, you must stay with me at the Hotel, and we will fix things up early in the morning."

* * *

Another day! Ede, irritable and weary, gazed from the doorway of the "George Inn." The little girl had not passed a good night, and Dr. Hamilton had promised to call early. It was nearly noon, and there were no signs of him. In a despairing mood,

the conjurer looked out on the muddy road, idly watching the last autumn leaves fluttering to the ground.

The toot of a motor horn caused him to gaze with passing interest in the direction of the sound, and to swear under his breath, when a large car pulled up some few yards from the Inn, and Hurdin stepped out.

"He hasn't enough I suppose," muttered Ede, "but comes with his beastly advertisement to gather the stray sixpences still left even in this small place," and turning his back on the little group of idlers who had gathered round the motor, he, walking into the bar, ordered a solitary glass of ale.

Apparently, however, the motorist was in search of something or somebody, for he quickly followed.

With the exception of the landlord, who bustled forward, Ede was the only other occupant. Hurdin giving a quick order to the former, approached the Professor. "Excuse me," he said, "but am I addressing Mr. Ede?" Ede eyed his rival a moment; then remarked in no pleasant tone "You are. I'm doing bad enough business, goodness knows, one would think you might leave a little corner of the globe for a small man in the hanky line."

Hurdin smiled. "Oh, stow that!" he said. "How's you daughter this morning?"

Ede stared. What did this man know of his daughter, or aught else except his own billing, motor,

and general aggrandizement? To do the posters justice, there was no mistaking the likeness of "The Greatest Magician." But what should this man know of a little "Fit up" show, or it's owner?

"My daughter is ill, I regret to say; you will excuse me, I am going to her now," and turning on his heel, Ede swung through the door, and, ascending the stairs, entered his own apartment.

He had scarcely entered the room before a knock at the door premised the entrance of Hurdin, who, having rapidly refreshed himself, once more reappeared.

An angry look came into Ede's eyes at the intrusion, to give way to something of a surprised expression, as Hurdin crossed the room to where the sick child lay. "And how do you feel to-day, Ness?" The little girl gazed at the big fur-coated man, rather in awe—"I'm pretty well, sir, thank you, but I have been ill, and"—turning to her father—"who is this gentleman, dad?"

"Never mind, little one, how would you like a ride in a motor car?"

Ness half raised herself, but fell weakly back again. "Have you a motor car?" she said, "Oh! that would be nice. I'm so tired of this."

"All right, my dear, you are coming for a ride; and with your parents' permission, for a holiday too. You have been pretty bad, so Dr. Hamilton tells me"—a quick glance of intelligence passed between

husband and wife, who, up to now had stood astonished spectators of the proceedings—"Well, now you are going to have a month's holiday in the Welsh hills at a nursing home, where everyone is going to be very kind to you, and your mother will soon see the roses back to your cheeks again."

With tears in her eyes, the conjurer's wife started forward, "You really mean it!" she cried—"Oh! how good of you."

But Hurdin turned to the window. "There's little to thank me for," he said, "that Dr. of yours has fixed it all up; he's in communication with the home now, and arranging things. He may be back by the next train—I left him worrying at the telephone. I've got a matinee on to-day so you must hurry up for us to get back in the car right away"—and brusquely to Ede, he added, "Shall we finish those drinks below?"

While Ness was being warmly wrapped up, the conjurers adjourned. "How can I ever thank you," Ede said in a husky voice—"You're a good sort and I have thought pretty bad things about you." "Don't you bother about that, put it all down to young Hamilton, he deserves it—I,—well never mind——."

"God bless him, God bless you both," was all Ede could answer.

Hurdin was busy with his pocket book. "Could you do with two or three 'Fivers'?" he said. "Let me lend them to you until things straighten out a bit,

and Ness is back again. No, I won't take a refusal; listen to me. Give up this part, and try the West of England,"—they don't get many 'Fit ups' that way, it's overdone here. Past one o'clock, and the show starts at three! I must be off."

The little girl, nearly smothered in a fur rug, bade rather a tearful good-bye to her parents, and as the car was starting, Ede grasped the hand of his benefactor. "Some day, I hope to square this."

Hurdin smiled, "That's all right, old man, I hadn't always a big show," was all he said.

Professor Swankton's Ruse.

(A HOLIDAY EPISODE.)

THE picturesque bridge, with its ivy-clung buttresses at the entrance to the town of Tamstock is, as every Devonshire visitor knows, the particular beauty spot of the neighbourhood, and near by I had fixed up my easel, preparatory to sketching the charming picture formed by the dancing stream, fresh from the rocky boulders of the moor.

The main road, as it enters the town, turns at rather a sharp angle, and one with an eye to the artistic is glad to remove their gaze from the ugly bill hoarding, and even the little barber's shop on the far side of the road, which form an incongruous contrast to the scene of sylvan beauty presented fifty yards or so further on.

My easel being set up in close proximity to a gate in the hedge which, excepting for a few feet of meadow land, borders the river, passers by might have the privilege of admiring the view and my efforts at portraying it on canvas at the same time. Soothed with this knowledge, and having settled myself more or less uncomfortably on that most unstaple of resting places, an artist's sketching stool, it was with anything but good humour that I almost immediately rose again in response to an imperative "Hi!" from the region of the gate.

The speaker, from his apparel, seemed to be a working mason or something of the sort, very much down on his luck, judging by the general state of his appearance, and the stubbly nature of his chin.

"Were you calling me?" I asked.

"Beg yer pardon, sir, I am sorry to bother you, but——" and he hesitated.

"Oh, don't apologise, what is it you want, and hurry up."

I was anxious to get back to my canvas, near which an enquiring cow seemed to be contemplatively interested.

"Well, sir, I be going in opposite to get a shave" (the knowledge cheered me somewhat), "and I wondered if you would be so kind as to keep a heye on this yere bag o' tools for a few minutes, seeing as you're staying a bit."

"Certainly," I replied. "But why in the name of wonder cannot you take the bag in with you; it's not very large."

"No, sir, it aint that; you see—well, the fact is, the barber over there has a dog; he's a very good dog and a sort of pal of mine, and sometimes coming 'ome on a Saturday I 'ave a few scraps in the bag, left over breakfast, and he noses round for them. Well, to-day Mrs. Cummins up at the farm gave me a couple of puddins for the missus, and as there aint nowhere much to rest the bag on there, 'cept the floor——"

"I see," I broke in, "your canine friend might

help himself while you were being operated on. All right, leave the bag, I'll keep an eye on it"; and with profuse thanks the labourer made for the hairdressers.

"While this temporary deposit business was in progress, my gaze had wandered across the road to the hoarding; the principal item of the advertisements setting forth that Professor and Madam Swankton, "The world's greatest conjurers and thought readers," would open at the Public Hall, Tamstock, for six nights on the Monday following. Just beneath this advertisement a disreputable tramp had been tinkering with an equally disreputable bicycle, these items being mentioned as they had a considerable bearing on what followed.

The bag of tools had been carefully placed in the corner of the gateway, and my easel, being a few yards away on the other side, I concluded all would be safe pending the return of the bag's owner.

Having resumed work but a few moments, a slight sound as though the gate was being shaken, caused me to look in the direction of my charge; what was my horror to find that it had disappeared? The next few moments were somewhat exciting. I vaulted the gate just in time to see the cyclist mount his machine and pedal rather leisurely up the road with the tool bag dangling over his shoulder, and the owner in hot pursuit as fast as his short legs could carry him.

The road in the direction leading away from the

town is fairly straight for half-a-mile, and but little distance had been covered by pursuer and pursued before a gust of wind carried away the tramp's head-gear in the shape of a much ill-used bowler hat, revealing a head of hair carefully parted down the centre. It struck me as curious that a tramp should take such pains over this single part of his adornment, considering that the remainder of his attire was *négligé*, to say the least of it.

As the hat fell, the cyclist seemed to put on extra speed, and in a short time was out of sight. The mason, giving up the chase, returned to me out of breath, and apparently very much out of temper.

"You're a nice sort of gent," he remonstrated, gazing ruefully at the battered felt hat which he had picked up. "I'd no sooner got in the shop, when 'appening to look over my shoulder I sees that sinner dart across and grab my bag; couldn't you have collared him?"

"I cannot help it, as you must have seen," I replied, rather nettled. "You had better go to the police about it; I am sorry, but it wasn't my fault." A little crowd of passers by had by this time congregated, and to a chorus of "blooming shame," and the like, the man walked away towards the town.

These events happened on the Saturday, and as I purposed putting in the following week at Tamstock, in the expectation of hearing more of the matter, I was not disappointed. The following Monday it rained

solidly the whole day, and when the evening at last arrived, I bethought myself of the entertainment advertised to take place at the Public Hall; more especially as, being an amateur conjurer, the performance appealed to me. Entering rather late, I had to put up with a back seat; all accommodation being on the ground floor, and catering apparently for the popular classes, the greater part of the hall was given over to the cheaper seats.

The first part of the performance consisted of conjuring and illusions, Professor Swankton possessing no mean merit as a sleight-of-hand performer, and, after the interval, the conjurer introduced what he described as "The feats of thought transference, presented by that truly wonderful lady, Madam Swankton!" Madam, having been thus introduced, pieces of paper were distributed to various members of the audience, who were asked to write any question they pleased, afterwards retaining the paper. Madam was then placed in a mesmeric sleep and replied to the different queries, greatly to the wonder of the very provincial audience.

I had seen the whole business so many times, and knowing well how the trick was done, it had ceased to interest me, so was about to leave the building when something about a lost bag arrested my attention.

"Someone at the back of the hall," said the clairvoyant, "I think he is a mason, he is dressed in a light tweed suit, and wears a turn-down collar; he

enquires about a bag of tools that was stolen from him by a man with a bicycle on Saturday last. It was near the Tamstock Bridge that the theft was committed. Tell him that the tramp was afraid to keep the tools, and that the bag is buried near the first tree after passing the second milestone on the Exeter Road."

"A Free Mason who lost a bag of tools on Saturday?" queried the professor. "Will he please stand up?"

My friend of the bridge episode immediately showed up somewhere near the back.

"Is that right, sir? Did you lose some tools last week?"

"Quite right," came the reply. "But I aint no Free Mason all the same; I'm a Buffalo, if anyone wants to know, and what I asked was where the man is that pinched my bag."

The professor apparently hastened to pour oil on the troubled waters.

"Madam Swankton does not profess to tell you everything, but should you be fortunate enough to recover your loss, may I ask you to come here tomorrow evening and say so; in any case, we should like to know the result, so will you please accept this ticket for our next performance?" At this there was considerable applause, and with the reply to a few more questions, the entertainment ended.

During the whole evening I had been haunted by some memory in connection with the professor's carefully parted hair; and it was only when the curtains

finally closed that it dawned on me—the tramp with the bicycle whose hat had fallen off! "So that's their little game," I thought. "Well! if this is conjuring it *is* playing it pretty low down."

The hall had nearly emptied, when I presented myself to the pianist, who was collecting his music. "Will it be possible for me to have a word with Professor Swankton?" I asked. The pianist did not know, but would enquire. I waited a few moments, when the man of magic appeared before the curtains.

"Good evening," he remarked pleasantly enough, "You wished to speak to me?" "I do," I replied. "As an amateur conjurer, which I have been pretty well all my life, I wish to say that the way in which that poor man has been defrauded of his bag and tools, and given so much unnecessary anxiety for several days, merely that you may gain a cheap advertisement, is not conjuring, but, in my opinion, very nearly swindling."

The professor still beamed on me. "You do not fully understand—" he began, but I interrupted him. "It is quite useless arguing; when your hat blew off on Saturday, I noticed, among other things, your manner of wearing the hair. I recognise you as the cyclist who took the bag, and I have come here to say that unless, to-morrow evening, you make your wretched dupe some pecuniary compensation for this business, I shall expose the whole matter."

Professor Swankton looked rather annoyed at the beginning of my tirade, but at length he was evidently

struck with some point of humour, for his features broadened into a laugh. "You assure me that you *are* a conjurer," he said, "and as such I suppose you are willing to keep conjurers' legitimate secrets?"

"Certainly," I replied, "but, do you call this sort of thing legitimate, do you consider——."

My further remarks were drowned in a roar of laughter from behind the curtain.

"Bill!" called the professor.

"Yes, guvnor," and in a state bordering on convulsions, with shirt sleeves rolled up and in another suit of clothes, appeared my labouring friend.

"You," I gasped!

"Yes, me, sir; you see it had to be worked on somebody, and you were handy," and then he added, deprecatingly, "You see, I'm a sort of combined baggage man and general assistant to this concern, I hope you don't mind?"

"But the tools," I remonstrated, "someone may go and search for them."

"That's all right, anyone may look, but we shall find them, you see the bag is buried *near* a tree, we did not say how near."

I joined heartily in the general merriment, and together with Madame Swankton, we afterwards made a merry supper party.

I saw a lot of the Swanktons during the ensuing week, and we left for town together at the end of our stay, their run having been as successful as my holiday had been a pleasant one.

Abouachie of the Coast.

A WEST AFRICAN STORY.

FOR ten hours the dug-out canoe, laden almost to the water's edge, with the mine manager, his traps, and a crowd of niggers, had steadily fought its way up the Ankobra river.

The rains had turned the usually placid water into something like a torrent, the powerful current trying the muscles of the natives, used as they were to the strenuous effort required to handle a canoe up a West African river at flood time.

Since landing at Axim, on the day previous, Robert Morland had been through the usual experiences and general unpleasantness which, through former knowledge of the Coast, he had learned to take as a matter of course. He had returned from the Canary Islands after a period of six weeks' leave, granted by his anything but philanthropic employers, that he might recover from a dose of malarial fever.

Though the sea was not very rough at the time of landing, the nigger crew of the surf-boat had succeeded in swamping Morland, with all his goods and chattels, and on reaching the shore these had to be sorted out, more or less dried, and apportioned to the various carriers, who, with the manager, slung between poles in a hammock, they jolted through

the Bush to the mouth of the Ankobra river, where a canoe awaited the party. The position of a passenger in a "dug-out" is anything but one of comfort, and it was with no small relief that just after the sudden equatorial plunge into darkness, the canoe and its occupants hove in sight of a few flickering bush lights that located the village of Bansu.

The prow of the boat had scarcely touched the bank when a low and distinctly feminine voice enquired, "That you, Master Morland?" as the stalwart form of the manager emerged from the darkness of the river to where the speaker stood.

Holding in her hand one of the lights which had been visible from the stream, Abouachie presented a pleasing picture. Of slim build, though with a figure charmingly rounded, eyes of a lustrous soft brown, and little feet, almost as small as a Calabar woman's, that peeped from beneath her equetta cloth wrap, she looked like a symbolical spirit of the dark Ankobra flowing swiftly but silently by.

"You see I no live for die this time, Abouachie," answered Morland, "I come back safe: but where is Quansah?"

"Oh, Quansah down mine," she replied, indifferently. "Them bad men too much down there. Quansah he no leave them long, he say I meet you, and give you this chit" (handing him a

letter), and then, petulantly,—"You no want Abouachie?"

"Of course, I want you both," answered Morland, smiling and anxious to smooth matters. "But I wanted to know how things are going on below;" to which the somewhat mollified maiden replied, "Oh, you will see Quansah, and know plenty soon."

Quansah was a Fanti, and a head man at the Lomassi mine, having under his supervision about thirty "boys," a choice muster of Krepis and Kroos and about as quarrelsome a crowd as one could find anywhere along the coast. He had a hard time, keeping them at work, and it is doubtful if the Fanti would have retained the job, for his life had been threatened on more than one occasion, but for the fact that he wished to marry Abouachie; though that dusky damsel was so beseiged by admirers, that who would be the favoured one was an open question.

Abouachie was the daughter of a chief, and having received some training at a missionary school, had, among her other accomplishments, become a fair cook. Morland, partly through the mediation of numerous presents to her father, had succeeded in retaining her as a domestic, notwithstanding the frequent visits of dusky suitors to his bungalow, and their further frequent depredations in the vicinity of the pine-apple patch.

The manager slowly walked towards his

bungalow, situated on slightly rising ground, a quarter of a mile from the native village, and close to the mine buildings. Arriving there, and having seen his belongings safely deposited and the canoe men paid, he turned his attention to the letter from the head man, while Abouachie busied herself preparing "chop." Knowing the weighty importance which "a letter to the manager" occupied in the native mind; it did not appear strange to Morland that Quansah should write him, though the latter knew he would in all probability meet his superior within a short time of his arrival.

As the manager expected, the missive was of the usual type, asking for an increase of pay, and though signed by the Fanti, was actually the laborious effort of a native clerk engaged on the mine. This clerk, for a consideration, acted as scribe for his less informed brethen, at such times as they desired to pour their woes into the unwilling ear of the chief residing at the property, or the directors of the Company at home.

The delectable epistle was scrawled over two sheets of foolscap and ran:—

Dear Sir,

I wish most respectfully and humbly beg your honour to allow me to lay this paragraph before you—that it will be very wonder that the whole inhabitants of this Globe, brilliantly celebrate your good luck, but I alone never see

the benefit of it. See how both men and women welcome the new days immediately the ding dong gives its proclamation at the mine, but I alone never see the benefit of it. Europeans in the business congratulate your good luck, but I alone never see the benefit of it. See how the Africans and the monkeys in the forest congratulate your good luck, but I alone never see the benefit of it. Even the company in England appreciates your good luck, because you have, I declare, renewed everything to perfection ; the fishes in the river shake their physical frames, the birds in the forest sing praising your good luck, but I alone never see the benefit of it.

Most honourable and most noble superintendent, for the cause of saying never see the benefit of it, see my last application to the chief accountant—did not take effect,—ditto surveyor, did not take effect,—ditto yourself, did not take effect, and my long expectation becomes hopeless.

And moreover, honourable sir, these Krepis and Kroos they bad men too much, they ask me to dash* them more, I no 'gree, they steal dynamite and perhaps—*I live soon for die!*

Well this is my last petition to you, and I sincerely hope that it may touch your present feelings without any more postponement,

Your obedient servant,

QUANSAH.

* Give presents.

Robert Morland laughed heartily when reading the first part of the letter, but his face assumed a serious expression when he arrived at the item referring to dynamite. If there was dissatisfaction among the batch of Krepis and Kroos, it might spread through the whole mine, and sedition of this sort must be nipped in the bud.

Having washed, fed, and refreshed himself, though still feeling anything but well, the manager decided to interview both Quansah and the men under his charge, and with that end in view betook himself to the engine house. An enquiry from the native in charge elicited the fact that Quansah's little crowd of malcontents were about due at the surface, and in a few minutes the workers belonging to the shift came tumbling out of the cage at the shaft's mouth. After a few words of greeting to Quansah, who anxiously enquired after the safe arrival of his "chit," and looked more cheerful on being informed by the manager that he would look into the matter, Morland had the native miners brought before him.

" What's the matter you boys make all this palaver with them head man," he said. " You savvee, *I no have ;* and you savvee Quansah *no have*. You come look me to-morrow at eight o'clock at bungalow, and I show you white man devil palaver."

Translated from West African trade English, this meant to the niggers that they were severely reprimanded ; but further that they would at any rate

see something out of the common, if they came to the manager's bungalow. Morland, knowing that they had the bump of curiosity largely developed, entertained little doubt, but that not only the disaffected party, but the entire village, wives and families, would be on hand at the appointed time.

Amongst his belongings the mine manager numbered a few conjuring tricks, originally picked up for him by an enthusiastic amateur friend, who had given them to Morland when he first left England. The latter had pointed out at the time, that though very interested in things magical he was no conjuror, and anyway he did not see much use in showing tricks to a lot of heathen.

To this the friend had sagely replied, " Well, old man, some day a few of the heathen might decide to *eat* you, and if I were in that unenviable position, single-handed, I would back a good conjuring trick against a six-shooter any day," in which remark there was, perhaps, a certain amount of solid sense. The result was that the apparatus was packed away in a case, and there it had stopped since Morland's first arrival at the Coast nearly two years before the events now narrated.

It was at this juncture that the remembrance of his friend's box of tricks occurred to the mine manager, and this then was the " Devil Palaver " with which he hoped to subdue the turbulent spirits of the " Lomassi Mines Limited."

Owing to the humidity of the climate, much of

the apparatus was discovered in what one might call a state of disintegration, but that night Morland, with the help of Abouachie, was able to get together sufficient for what, he smilingly remembered, his distant friend would call " a show."

Long before the hour named on the next day, literally hundreds of chattering savages occupied the space in front of the nearly depleted pine apple patch facing the bungalow, on the verandah of which was displayed an imposing array of canisters and other conjuring apparatus, the greater part of which, owing to its state of general decrepitude, it was quite impossible to use.

A sudden silence premised the opening address of the manager, who, in as commanding a voice as he could assume, addressed his audience.

" You men of Quansah and you men of Bansu village," he said, " I am going to show you Ju Ju* of the white man. What I do now will cause you no harm, but if you boys make any more palaver, or give more trouble, I warn you that my Fetish will work down the mine."

Knowing that his spectators were in a state of more or less nervous apprehension, Morland decided to try and put them at their ease, and he commenced by borrowing a bead bracelet from one of the native women ; this was placed in one of the before-mentioned canisters and caused to vanish. After some further

*Magic.

palaver, the manager ordered a pine apple to be chopped off, and on its being cut open, the original bracelet, together with half a dozen others, was extracted and distributed.

The "Mammies,"—the generic term given to all the native women—were greatly pleased at this, particularly the recipients of the gifts, and Morland's further magical inflictions were met by the niggers with short Ah's! as they gave vent to their expression of wonder and surprise.

The programme included the production of a quantity of artificial flowers—rather the worse for wear—and though this did not excite a great deal of interest, the last item produced an effect, ludicrous as it was unexpected.

Morland had made up a "property" cigarette, his own invention; the place usually occupied by tobacco being filled instead with guncotten. By a combination of certain chemicals, also contained in the wrapper, it was so arranged that a snap of the fingers would cause the guncotten to ignite. The conjurer leisurely opened his cigarette case and held up the "smoke" for inspection.

"You savvee them cigarette," he asked. There was a chorus of "Yes, Massa." "Now you look him," was the next remark, and at the same moment the manager tossed the cigarette in the air, where it disappeared in a flash of flame. This effect was more than the untutored savage could grasp, and with cries of dismay they fled pell mell back to the village.

Morland smiled rather grimly at the abrupt conclusion to his entertainment. "I think that they will have had enough Ju Ju for a time," he said to Abouachie, who, wondering only a little less than the audience in front, had witnessed the performance from the room of the bungalow.

"You a great chief," she said simply, and the soft brown eyes dropped beneath the glance of the young Englishman, who, with a little sigh and a hasty "Good-night, Abouachie," turned to his sleeping apartment. "A good girl," he soliloquised, "but – well, Quansah will marry her soon."

That night Morland had a return of the fever, and for many days it was a case of touch and go with him. There was no doctor at the Lomassi mine, but at a neighbouring property the faithful Quansah sought out a young medico, who was gaining experience and wasting his health, while endeavouring to raise sufficient capital to purchase a practice at home.

"Ah, Carter," said Morland, when the former arrived after a five mile trudge through the Bush, "you are a good chap to come all this way, you see I left the Islands a bit too soon it seems—I felt pretty fit too, but this beastly place is too close to the river——."

"Yes, and you will jolly well pass in your checks, if you don't soon get back home," broke in the doctor. "The Islands are all very well in their way, but for a man who has done nearly two years at the Coast, home

is the only tonic to set him up again. Got any whisky ?"

The manager smiled as he pointed to a cupboard. "In there, old man," he said, weakly, "and you can give me a dose as well. It's all very well," he continued, "to talk about going home. The company——"

"Oh hang the company, they know that a funeral out here costs less than a passage home by a long chalk, and that's about all they care."

"Well, they have treated me fairly enough, so far," said Morland, "but I've asked to be relieved more than once. I think but for the care of Abouachie I should probably have gone under before you arrived ; and then I have been worried with the men," and he retailed Quansah's tale of woe, concluding with a description of his (Morland's) conjuring efforts.

The doctor chuckled at the details of the latter. "That accounts for the bareness of your front garden," he said facetiously. "I noticed as I came in that there wasn't a pine left. They have been looking for more bracelets! Seriously though, I don't like these Krepis and Kroos when they get disaffected, and they are mostly so ; we have a crowd on our property. I should keep a weather eye open when you go down below again if I were you, but that won't be for a day or two—that is if you have, as I conclude, the bump of commonsense sufficiently developed."

Morland promised to obey instructions, and for a week after Carter's visit, though able to get about a

little, he did not descend the mine. The only outcome of his conjuring, as far as he could learn from Quansah, was that the natives were more or less in a state of funk, which, as the head man expressed it, would "No live for long time." One nigger, having received a minor injury and coming to the manager to have his wound tied up, had expressed his views that Morland was "Big man too much." "You take them mammy bracelet," he said ; "next time I look him, he live for pineapple ; you catch them cigarette, he make fire too much, we fear him and go for bush one time."

Morland smiled and offered the boy a genuine cigarette, saying, "He no make fire," but it was not accepted, and when he prepared to light it himself the native disappeared in quick time.

Early in the following week, though far from feeling fit, the manager decided to go below and see how things were progressing. Left to himself the West African native is a fairly indolent lot, and the few English and American miners who were engaged, cared little how much stuff was sent to the surface, providing their wages were regularly paid.

The usual spurt of energy was manifested at Morland's arrival, but it did not take the manager long to see that there had been considerable slackness during his absence, and he was not long in informing those concerned that if matters did not quickly improve there would shortly be extensive changes in the mine's staff native and otherwise.

The English speaking miners took matters lightly. They knew that they had been "slacking;" but what of it? They could not be replaced at a moment's notice, and any way the Lomassi was not the only mine on the Coast.

Not so the natives; they were for the most part sullenly silent, a silence which Morland knew boded ill, for as a rule the chattering of the niggers below was only equalled by the parrots and monkeys in their native forests above ground.

As the manager was about to retrace his steps from the end of the fourth level, where no one was at the time at work, in order to reach the cage, preparatory to being hauled to the surface, he was startled by hearing a light footfall coming from the direction of the shaft, and a moment later a form appeared in the semi-darkness.

Morland gripped his revolver. "What do you want here?" he demanded, his nerve, enfeebled by the fever, failing him, and attacked by a momentary cowardice of which he was inwardly ashamed.

The answer came in a woman's voice. "Hush! master, it is I, Abouachie!"

The manager was dumbfounded for a moment. "What ever are you doing here?" he said, "you must never—" but Abouachie placed her hand on his mouth. "Hush!" she whispered again, "you are in danger, master, don't talk now," and then in her agitation lapsing into the patois of the natives, "them

bad men, they kill you for die, come with Abouachie to the cage—quickly, quickly," and she hurried the weak-limbed man towards the mouth of the level, assisting him here and there over the uneven ground.

Morland hastened as best he could, and some hundred yards further on the pair were met by Quansah, who also appeared in search of his master. There was no time for words, for somehow now Morland felt the danger.

The party arrived at the cage; the head man had already jumped in and was assisting Morland, when a terrific explosion sent rocks and debris flying round the trio.

"The fiends," gasped Morland, "they are exploding dynamite."

A low moan from behind arrested his attention. It was Abouachie; a huge piece of the hanging roof had become detached, and had pinned the faithful girl to the ground by the hand and wrist. Morland tried to move the mass, but even with the help of Quansah this was found impossible. "Don't wait; for God's sake don't wait," she cried. "Them men have laid more trains, go quickly!"

Then the head man did a thing which only a savage could do. Seizing the fainting girl by the waist, he with a terrific effort wrenched her free.

"You come with Quansah," he said, "Quansah cannot live without Abouachi."

A moment later Morland gave the signal to be

hauled up, and the lightly freighted cage flew to the surface.

"Go fetch Doctor Carter," the manager ordered, and Quansah needed no second bidding.

After attending to the crushed hand as best as he could, and leaving Abouachie as comfortable as possible, Morland turned his attention to the mine. The shift was not due at the surface for an hour more, and the manager grimly awaited the arrival of the malcontents.

At length the cage shot up, and in three trips had brought the entire crowd to the surface. Ostentatiously fidgetting with the butt of his revolver, Morland spoke.

"What for you men of Quansah fire charge, without orders?" he said. No one ventured a reply, but all gazed with wooden headed stolidity at one another. The manager soon saw that it was no good, and that to find the individual offender was a hopless task. "You all go to office and get pay," he continued, "and"—drawing his revolver—"the last man of you left on the property to-night will get this," and he significantly tapped his weapon.

Before sunset not a man of Quansah's gang could be found either at the mine or in the village.

Two hours later brought the arrival of Doctor Carter. "What's up, old man?" he said on meeting Morland. "I can't make much sense out of your head man. Some woman he said, 'live for die' if I did not hurry up, and he has almost carried me through parts of the Bush."

"Ah," replied the manager, "Quansah is in love and it is Abouachie who is hurt, and badly, come and see her at once if you are not too much used up."

The Doctor's verdict was a practical one, he amputated the crushed hand, without the aid of an anæsthetic, and marvellous to relate in less than a month Abouachie was about again, though carrying her arm painfully in a sling.

It transpired that one of her many admirers had learnt of the plot to, at any rate, give the manager a warm reception, on his next visit below ground. This man, it so happened, had looked in at the manager's bungalow, and mentioned what he had heard to Abouachie, that dusky heroine, having without hesitation, at once rushed to her master's succour, with the result narrated.

* * *

After this disturbance Morland thought it best to remove Quansah from the mine, and now, installed at the bungalow, he was busily engaged on what Carter had described as "the front garden."

Some few months later the manager was notified that his relief was at last on the way out. He called in his two faithful adherents, and to the head man said, "How would you like to become a trader, Quansah?"

The nigger laughed. "Trader want plenty money, massa, I no have enough, but I soon get. Then I take Abouachie to Axim, and we open store.

"You can take Abouachie now then," answered Morland, "here are fifty pounds for her and yourself. When you have settled with the chief, her father come to me, I too go down to the Coast plenty soon," and with every token of joy the native withdrew.

"And you, Abouachie?" queried Morland, turning to the Fanti maiden, "will you too be happy?"

The black girl choked back a stifled sob. "You go back to your own country true, and to white woman?"

"Yes, Abouachi, back to England, and to a white woman who waits for me."

The native girl drew herself proudly erect. "Abouachie did well to go down mine that day," she said.

The manager seized the little hand still left to the faithful girl. "Abouachie did very well, the white woman in England will always pray as I shall for a little heroine in Africa, the daughter of a great chief," he said. "Go back to the village now, Abouachie, to-morrow you and Quansah may take canoe for Axim. I can manage for a day or two alone."

* * *

From the verandah of his bungalow Morland saw a tiny canoe put off from the native village. A stalwart form was busy with a paddle in front, and seated amidst a pile of miscellaneous goods and chattels was Abouachie. Catching sight of his late master the head man waved a farewell. Morland watched the

frail craft until it rounded a bend in the river and was lost to sight. Then he sighed, lit his pipe, and turned in to do some packing.

"She might have waved good-bye as well," he muttered to himself. But Abouachie was otherwise engaged; there in the canoe, amidst the heap of worldly possessions, she was silently weeping.

A Conjurer's Apprentice.

CONVERSATION had become desultory when on a certain wet afternoon, at a hostelry adjoining the Imperial Palace of Varieties, two or three of we artists had gathered together.

Somebody had made a disparaging remark with reference to amateurs and their shortcomings, and no one had ventured any comment.

Seated at a table near by was old Vaubin—Professor Vaubin, to give him his correct title—a conjurer of the old school, who, either through lack of energy or dexterity, or perhaps a little of both, had in course of time become relegated to the small-type portion of the contents bills, at halls where he was still fortunate enough to get an engagement.

He had for some time been absorbing liquid refreshment,—and our conversation; though without taking any part in the latter, until the question of amateurs cropped up; then he vouchsafed the statement—"Most of you boys were amateurs once upon a time!"

There was a general laugh at the old conjurer's sally, and he continued, "I know an amateur, who has done as well for himself as any of us—may be, better than most—though he did not stick to the profession, which is perhaps just as well, for then he might not be able to pitch money away on precious metals and things like this!" While speaking, Vaubin had

detached from his person a scarf pin, which he handed us for inspection. It represented a conjuror's wand, beautifully made, the rod portion being of gold, mounted at either end with platinum, on which were engraved in minute letters the monagrams H.V. and G.M.

After being duly admired (for the pin was really a work of art), and returned to its owner, somebody presumed it had a history, and we were at length regaled with a story, which the magician told somewhat as follows.

"It must be rather more than eighteen years ago, that I was performing in a country town somewhere within a hundred miles of Glasgow. We were doing about the usual business, for I was known in the place, and worked round there pretty regularly.

One evening, after the show, my wife came to me with the information that a man, who we had frequently noticed in front at several of our performances, desired an interview. "He won't state his business," she said, "but I should hardly think the old chap wanted to learn conjuring at his time of life!"

I went down to the stage and there met the man, who looked —as he afterwards proved to be—a well-to-do farmer. In the broadest Scotch he greeted me with —"I just lookit in, Professor, to ask if you had a vacancy for an apprentice?"

The remark somewhat staggered me. "You require some lessons in conjuring?" I ventured,

unconsciously taking in the huge hands, that looked as though they could crush anything less fragile than, say, a billiard ball, without undue exertion.

My visitor chuckled. "It's no me that I'm asking about," he said, "it's the boy. You ken I brought him to see your tricks one night during your last visit, and since that time nothing will do but he must become a conjurer. I may say that the wife and mysel' are verra sorry," he added ruefully, "for we wanted him to keep on at the farm."

"But," I remonstrated, "I never heard of a conjuror taking an apprentice; sometimes we have a pupil or so, but they generally get tired of it after a few lessons; it takes a lot of practice to become a good conjurer."

"Aye, that's just what the wife and I were thinking," was the reply. "Now it struck me that if you would take Geordie on for a bit, he would tire of things pretty soon. He's never been far away from home, and though I dinna want anything in the way of unkindness, you need not make the path too rosy for him, so to speak."

To shorten my story, the outcome of our interview was that arrangements were made that the farmer's son should join us when we left the town, and at the end of the week I was introduced to George Mackay.

He was then, a not very brilliant looking boy; about sixteen years of age, with, as far as I can

remember, large ears and a head of hair of the fieriest hue. He proved extremely shy, and to my enquiry whether he thought that conjuring was all play and no work, replied that he "Wasna afraid o' work anyway, and then blushed at his own temerity. Subsequent events proved that he was right in his own estimation, but at the time I set him packing up the props and took care to keep him hustling, as the Americans say.

At our next town I did not let "Geordie" appear in public, for having tried him as an assistant when rehearsing, his mis-directed energy caused me the loss of a valuable piece of apparatus, which I had to do without for a fortnight while it was being repaired in London. The lad was a willing worker, but it struck me that he was getting a trifle homesick, though far too proud to show it.

I was at that time performing the old inexhaustible bottle trick, and it was in connection with this that my energetic apprentice came his first cropper, when a few weeks later he had his first introduction to an audience. I had carefully instructed him to step on the platform from behind a screen, bringing with him a tray, on which to receive the glasses when filled with wine. Suspended between his shoulders was another trick bottle, so he should have kept an "eyes front" position during the time I exchanged the empty bottle for the full one.

When the cue was given for him to make an

appearance, he somehow succeeded in kicking the edge of the screen, with the result that it partly folded back, revealing to everybody my table, set with a couple of hat loads, a cabbage, and one or two other trifles, which the audience were not expected to see until produced magically.

This was bad enough in all conscience, but when my intelligent assistant, turning to set matters right, exposed the other bottle, concealed behind his back, my feelings can better be imagined than described. However, making some joke about his stealing my wine, with anything but a gentle hand I pushed him "behind the scenes" again, and got through the remainder of the performance without any further help.

After this experience, I was somewhat chary of producing Mackay in public again, and though he worked conscientiously enough at whatever he was set to do, I mentally put him down as a rather good-natured fool.

One night I was performing a trick in which some playing cards selected by the audience, were fired from the mouth of a pistol at a large demon's head, which stood on a pedestal at one side of the stage.

The trick used to go well in those days, though I suppose nobody would think much of it now; anyway the result of the shot was to make some of the cards fly out from the demon's mouth, while the remainder rose from his hair. The cards were, of course,

duplicates, and all an assistant required to do was to pull a string at the correct moment, the mechanism contained within the head doing the rest.

The obvious cue to the concealed assistant was the report of the pistol, previous to which I used to count, in a loud voice, "One! Two! Three!" at the last word pulling the trigger.

On this particular occasion the weapon missed fire, but not so Mackay; at the word "three" out shot the cards from the obliging demon, and I can feel the shiver that went running down my back now as a member of the audience in a clear voice remarked, "That's a wonderful pistol, Professor!"

Geordie's last effort, however, surpassed everything, and it was a good job that he decided immediately after that conjuring was not his forte, for he had succeeded in reducing me to a state of nervous irritability.

Notwithstanding the fairly heavy premium that his father was paying, I did not want to arrive at a condition bordering on lunacy!

Included in my apparatus I had a cabinet, made closely on the principle of that used by the celebrated Davenport Brothers. I did not use it for rope tying feats, as they did, but to produce a "spirit," the spirit being generally a likely youth hired for the occasion. As his sole efforts were confined to walking about the stage clad in white, with a preparation of phosphorus on his face, swinging the while various luminous

objects from the end of a jointed fishing rod, the occupation could not be called brain racking.

I had arranged for Mackay to personate the spiritual form, and everything had gone well at rehearsal. By the footlights I had fixed two fine wires, which, connecting to a bye-pass, permitted the hall-keeper to raise or to lower the light to a ghostly dimness as required.

Unfortunately the extra gas tap could only be conveniently fixed on the side of the platform opposite its only entrance, so the wires had to run the full length of the footlights, though quite concealed from the audience by the reflectors.

After a little patter anent spiritualism, and so forth, the wraith made its appearance on this fateful night, and a pretty horrible object it looked. First mysterious music was wafted over the footlights, and among other effects a luminous star floated gently over the heads of the audience.

Poor Mackay, that star was his undoing, and mine as well as far as that town was concerned.

Somehow Geordie got the cord hooked in the wires connected with the gas arrangements, and in a moment a flood of light revealed Mackay, in all his ghastly whiteness, half in and half out of the cabinet, pulling for dear life at the end of a fishing rod, while the cardboard satellite dangled ignominiously over the front of the footlights.

There was a pretty uproar, for I immediately

shut off the gas in order to give Mackay time to clear out, which he was not loth to do, and when we lit up again the pianist played the National Anthem.

Luckily for all concerned the performance was nearly over, and the audience departed without breaking things.

The next day I parted with Mackay.

"I think I'll awa hame," he said, "I'm verra sorry to ha gien you all this trouble, but I dinna think conjuring will be ony mair use to me."

As I am firmly convinced that Geordie would never be of any more use to conjuring, I merely wished him good-bye, dropping a mild hint that maybe his father's vocation would in the end prove the best; and that's all I heard of George Mackay for many a day.

About a month ago I received a letter from Canada. It was from Geordie.

A relative had sent him a newspaper, he said, with the notice of a variety entertainment, in which appeared the name of Henri Vaubin. Recognizing his old instructor, he thought I should like to know that he was getting on well, and was in fact just starting a farm of his own. In conclusion, if I would call at a certain jeweller's at Ludgate Hill, London, I should find there a little souvenir, which he trusted I would wear for many a day, in remembrance of that awful night he was a "spirit."

I sent up to the jeweller as directed, and this little pin was forwarded.

Old Vaubin here borrowed a cigarette from one man, a match from another, and then he said,

"Now which of you former amateurs is going to stand me some refreshment?"

The Flat.

THE advertisement that appeared in the *Western News* was certainly alluring, at any rate so it appeared to Dick Reynolds, clerk by profession, at the office of Bark and Quinine's, the famous brewers, and amateur conjurer at such time as the eagle eye of the head cashier lapsed in its viligance.

Mr. Richard Reynolds, having exhausted the possibilities of vanishing ink-pots, and producing rulers from the coalscuttle and other unexpected places, had idly taken up the local paper; and here at last, he felt, was an opening worthy of his genius.

The advertisement ran:—"Wanted, a young gentleman, preferably with some knowledge of conjuring, to assist in the management and take part share in a high class variety tour.—Apply Lionel Ackland, Esq., c/o Victoria Hall, Bestwith."

Mr. Ackland was interviewed at the first available opportunity; he appeared to Dick a "hail fellow well met" type of man, in fact it was an easy matter for Ackland to *appear* anything, having in his time gone through various experiences and adopted most roles ranging from "starring" as Hamlet, with a barn storming crowd, to selling pills in the market place of country towns.

So far, this versatile gentleman had succeeded

in escaping the attentions of certain writ servers, more or less interested in the cases of widow landladies with too much trust in human nature, and Lionel Ackland, Esq., in particular.

However, owing to temporary embarrassment, and an alarming increase in perspicuity on the part of the world in general—according to Ackland's point of view—the said gentleman found himself perilously near the pill business again; so with the laudable intention of running a variety company on someone else's money, he had advertised in the local paper.

During the course of conversation with Reynolds he gracefully worked round to the main argument.

"With me," he said, "it is not altogether a question of money; being connected with several other concerns now touring I require someone who can at times take entire charge of things. Obviously, I must take the precaution to ensure that my manager has the welfare of the show at heart, and I should therefore require a deposit of, say, fifty pounds, which, as you would be able to do a turn, would soon come back in the salary in which I should pay—perhaps six pounds weekly."

Though this presented a new and less pleasant aspect to things, Dick Reynolds was not at a loss for the money. A relative had some time before left him wealth in the shape of a whole hundred pounds, but it had in a large part evaporated. Not that Dick had wasted much, for with the exception of a little conjuring apparatus, the greater part had gone to purchase

a few luxuries for an invalid mother, of whom he was unfashionable enough to be rather fond.

Ackland further pointed out to Reynolds that he (Dick) was without experience in management, and that valuable knowledge such as he would get was, as the wily manager expressed it, "Not to be sneezed at."

Though a clever enough conjurer, Dick was a "Flat" at show business, and so it came about that the money changed hands, Messrs. Bark and Quinine lost their clerk, and in a few weeks flaring posters acquainted the inhabitants of a town in Wiltshire that Ackland's Royal Variety Amalgamation would open for six nights on a certain day of March, 19——.

Ackland had got together a small ladies' orchestra of undoubted ability, but the balance of his company consisted of a low—a very low—comedian, a lady "Serio," of doubtful age but acid temperament, and a young gentlemen who called himself an actor vocalist, a very poor species of the genius hambone or raw amateur.

The opening performance could scarcely be called a success; it had been snowing steadily through the day, and an apathetic audience partly filled the hall when the curtain was rung up on the comedian, that gentleman shortly coming off with pronounced views regarding the audience, of which, for their peace of mind, it was as well they remained in ignorance.

Dick presented his conjuring, which met with

more success, primitive as were most of the tricks shown, but the entertainment dragged, and the item that seemed to mostly enliven the folk in front was the National Anthem.

Reynolds, being also acting manager, had to check the takings at the conclusion of the performance, and when the amount was presented to Lionel Ackland, Esq., that gentleman's expression was full of adjectives. "We've given them a good show any way," he grumbled—the statement was open to question—"So may be, when the notices come out, we shall fill up."

The notices duly appeared; they were of the nice puffy provincial type, but they quite failed to bring in the paying public, and a week's dreary performances to half empty houses sufficed to bring the spirits of the company to a very low ebb.

At the next town booked, the half-frozen company arrived on the following Sunday. Ackland had remarked to Dick that he supposed he would have to "Take 'em all on and see what would happen."

No one having received more than a quarter of his or her salary could do much else than come on, though the "Serio" had practically pitched the amount paid her at Ackland's head, and had further threatened to be "all over him" in five seconds or thereabouts if the full amount were not forthcoming.

The manager, concluding that discretion was the better part, paid up, on which the lady expressed her views to the effect that he was "little better than a

blighted ham bone" himself, and forthwith shook the dust of the Variety Amalgamation from her feet.

With this deleted company the performance opened on the Monday following, and at its conclusion Dick was enabled to hand over to Ackland about sufficient money to pay the expenses of the hall, the owner of which palatial building had only permitted its use on condition that the daily rental was paid at the fall of the curtain.

Ackland now drifted into profanity. "Just run round to the dressing-rooms," he said to Reynolds," and get the crowd on the stage; I shall have to talk to them, I suppose," and then he filled in the interval by giving the owner of the hall his views with regard to that gentleman's acquisitiveness.

When the company arrived on the scene, trusting that at last "The Ghost would walk,"* they were met by the manager, who proceeded to disconsolately address them:

"Ladies and Gentlemen," he said, "as you know, we have since the start been playing to poor houses. The fault has not been yours or mine; I can only suppose that the wretched weather has kept the public indoors. I regret that I still find it impossible to pay your salaries, and I beg to suggest with deep sorrow that the company be disbanded."

There was a grim silence for a few moments, and

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* Salaries be paid.

then the leader of the ladies' orchestra burst forth with pent up indignation.

"Mr. Ackland," she said, "On behalf of the ladies I have with me, many of whom are far from their homes, I ask you if it was fair to engage us for a two months' tour, and now at the end of the first week to leave us stranded. You engaged me, I in turn have engaged my orchestra, and now I have not the money to pay them!"

Here the lady dissolved into tears, supported by the second violin, with audible sniffs from the others.

"What right had you to start the concern," she continued, "with no capital, just trusting to luck—our luck indeed! a nice place it has landed us all!

Ackland merely shrugged his shoulders and looked sulky as, making off the stage he replied, "I am sorry, it is unfortunate, but cannot be helped, Good-night."

The manager, however, had reckoned without Reynolds, whose eyes were by this time opened to the whole miserable swindle.

"You will stay where you are for a few moments, if you please Mr. Ackland," he said, "*I* have a few remarks to make now."

The company crowded round, and Ackland had perforce to remain, not caring to run the gauntlet of the incensed performers.

"I should like you all to know," continued Reynolds, "that this "gentleman" has mulct me to

the tune of fifty pounds, and some of this money must be still in his possession. "If the show had been successful doubtless all might have been well, but having done bad business, Mr. Ackland does not choose to pay a farthing out of his own pocket, preferring rather to leave us stranded. I will not say exactly what I think, but merely ask him, at any rate, to honourably pay our salaries up to to-night."

The manager turned furiously on Dick. "I tell you I have no money," he thundered, "the advertisements swallowed your miserable amount, and more of mine with it!"

"That's a lie, gov." chimed in the comedian, "for to my knowledge at least one printer has followed you on here. I met the man this morning, and he told me that the billing has not been paid for and that there are a few others you have done in, who would just love to know of your whereabouts.

It rapidly dawned an Ackland that he was in a tight place, but, clever rogue that he was, his nerve did not desert him.

"Look here, all of you," he said, "I have a few pounds, it is true, and as far as the money will go you may have it, but you might leave me enough to buy a railway ticket. I'm as hard hit as you are," here he groped in his pocket, "Where the dickens is my pocket book; Oh! I remember, in my overcoat; just half a minute, it is in the ticket office."

Slipping through the pass door, Ackland made

a dive for his overcoat, which was actually laying on a chair in the stalls.

Hastily donning it, and shaking his fist at the curtain, he muttered, "Pay you, no; by jingo I'll see you all in blazes first."

The main entrance was not yet closed, and hurrying past the caretaker. with a surly "Good-night," he disappeared.

It was from the caretaker that the company received the cheering information. He came on the stage, carrying a lantern and a jug of milk, being followed in stately dignity by the Hall cat.

"Shall you be much longer?" he enquired, "Because I'd like to be getting 'ome—nice affable sort o' gent, your boss, I don't think, I've just let him out and shut up in front——."

And The Royal Variety Amalgamation recognised that they were "done!"

For a few tense moments, interest was centred on the cat peacefully despatching its supper, heedless of the raging spirits around her; at last the "Flat" broke the silence.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," he said, "You are, I think, all professionals (the actor vocalist squared himself up) and have been the dupes of a miserable fraud. "You may feel that I am in some measure responsible—at any rate, it was my money that indirectly brought you all this trouble. I can only say that I am very sorry, and if you will meet me

at the Station to-morrow morning, I hope to arrange that you may return to town. I fear it will be a long time before any of us meet Ackland again, and I can only hope that this may be our last experience of the sort."

At this there were general sounds of approval, and at the appointed time on the next morning the company arrived on the railway station.

The train was late, and for some reason crowded, Dick having considerable trouble to find berths both for the ladies, and, in most cases, their bulky instruments.

"Come, hurry up," sang out the comedian, "or you will get left."

"I shouldn't wonder a bit," said Dick smiling good humouredly, "My home is only about ten miles from here, and as it's a fine morning I should like a walk."

"Walk?" echoed the funny man. "Great Scott! you must be fond of exercise; well, anyhow, you might lend me half-a-crown until next time, I should like to lubricate somewhere between here and town."

The whistle sounded, and the train started as Dick turned out the lining of his empty pockets. "Sorry old chap," he shouted, "I haven't a cent. left!"

* * *

There is a sequel to most stories. Messrs. Bark and Quinine did not regain their clerk, for the conjuring "kink" is a hard one to remove. On the

road now there is a big magician, great in mind and in body, for he turns the scale at fourteen stone or so.

He is a quiet enough personage off the stage, with the benevolent expression of a jovial monk, and there are but few who could recognise in him the good-natured "Flat" who, a decade ago, sent home the little "crowd" who, as he now would tersly put it, "Dried up!"

De Ceps.

THE neat little black Imperial with which De Ceps nightly adorned his chin, coupled with the equally black moustache on his upper lip, conveyed to an admiring public that the conjurer was as French as his name implied.

Nevertheless, the birthplace of De Ceps was Cornwall, notwithstanding the Continental hairsute adornment, and the foreign sounding name, which William Tregoan—to give his real cognomen—had adopted for stage purposes. He by the way, had coined it more or less ingeniously from the Latin-English word, "deception."

On the boards, and off, De Ceps had seldom been without admirers, mostly of the opposite sex, no doubt, though with the afore-mentioned moustache—which actually grew on him—his jet black hair, and débonnaire manner, there was a certain attractiveness about the little man which set him on good terms with most folk.

When he had first taken to conjuring for a living, the energetic young Cornishman had been content to perform single-handed, but the demand on the part of an amusement-loving public had necessitated his first employing a male assistant, and very shortly after a young lady. She emerged on occasion from sundry mysterious cabinets and boxes, which the conjurer

distinctly proved to hold nothing more tangible than a little almosphere immediately preceding the lady's appearance.

It was, of course, unfortunate that Lena Barton, the lady in question, should take it into her foolish head that her employer might some day make a possible husband. Unfortunate in the first case, because the feeling was entirely unreciprocated on the part of De Ceps, and furthermore, owing to her utter lack of interest in things magical, and the general dulness of an uneducated mind, she could form no fit partner for the conjurer.

She had occupied but two roles from childhood; graduating from a minor position in the corps de ballet, to that of lady assistant to a magician.

The latter vocation she had filled only once before her employment by De Ceps, and though a lithe figure, made up her mind that the occupation was considerably less arduous than that of a ballet-girl.

De Ceps had no fault to find, and being impervious to the lady's wiles, things had gone on comfortably enough until increasing properties and illusions made it necessary for the Company to be augmented by an additional lady.

The girl whose fortune it was to eventually fill this position, was the only daughter of a great conjurer, who had ceased for ever to wield the magic wand.

Professor Claydon had left the world with its

deceptions, and he had also left a widow and daughter; the former without regrets, and the two latter with very little of this world's goods.

A mutual friend of the two conjurers had introduced Dorothy Claydon to De Ceps as a young lady well versed in the ways of conjurers, capable of performing alone, if necessary, but at that moment decidedly hard up. And so it came about that the Cornishman obtained a new assistant, and for the first and only time fell really and truly in love.

No one could decry the conjurer's taste, for Dorothy was as sweet and gentle a maid as one could meet, utterly untainted with the mundane knowledge of the variety stage, where indeed her father had seldom taken her to perform, his entertainment never having been of the class that attracted a music-hall audience.

The advent of the new-comer was a source of little pleasure to Lena Barton. That lady was not slow to note the impression made on the magician by one whom she soon came to regard as a rival.

Dorothy, quite unconscious of the conflicting emotions raging around her, went on steadily doing her best, and succeeding so well in the magical act which De Ceps presented, that he at length decided to add a thought-reading *seance* to the programme.

The method of conveying the required information to the "medium" was in this case a system of telegraphy, worked by a concealed assistant who,

standing in the wings, tapped the necessary message to the neighbourhood of the chair on which the *clairvoyant* was seated.

The performance had been presented on several occasions without a hitch, until one night the vindictive Lena contrived, unseen, to cut one of the wires connected with the electrical arrangement.

The effect was, of course, disastrous. De Ceps managed somehow to convey a little information to his assistant, but the "Silent thought transmission" he had talked about to the audience was inclined to be very much of a frost.

The source of the trouble was quickly located after the performance, and the conjurer did his best to discover the malefactor, but without avail.

Lena Barton was too sharp to be readily caught napping, and as she took care not to repeat the experiment the matter was for the time forgotten by all save Hendon, the old baggage man.

He, to a great extent, had, like his master, fallen under the ineffable charm of Dorothy's kindly manner, and further, there was little love lost between him and the imperious Lena. No one had ever known her to turn aside for the purpose of performing a kindly action to anybody. She seemed even to go out of her way to annoy the old chap, who, though a regular slow coach, at any rate fulfilled his duties faithfully.

One Monday morning, soon after the episode

mentioned, Hendon was fixing up the properties for the weekly rehearsal; which De Ceps insisted on with punctual regularity. The company were showing at a dilapidated old theatre, which at its last gasp, had been turned into a music hall by the disgusted lessee, who had put on everything in turn, and lost money most of the time.

The only light on the stage came from the flickering T piece, which projected over the footlights; and Hendon was getting the big mirror into position for the illusion known as Vanity Fair. The huge sheet of glass was rather more than the old man could handle alone, but De Ceps had not turned up, and the only person handy was Lena, who, quite contrary to her usual custom, had arrived early.

Hendon looked across to where she stood in conversation with an opulant comedian—who was doing most of the talking, talk of the most entertaining description to himself—mainly about himself, as per usual.

"Miss Barton," ventured the baggage man at last, "would you mind steadying this 'ere glass, while I get the bolts in?"

Hendon heard something that sounded very much like "Old Fool," but, though with no very good grace, Lena crossed the stage and steadied the mirror, while the old man fumbled in the semi-darkness, screwing up the bolts that kept the illusion in position.

"Ah! that's all right; thankee miss," said

Hendon, rising from his knees, "the plaguey things a bit rocky, I must tell the governer and have it looked at, or some day that 'ere glass will get a bit bent."

"It looks rather weak about the knees," assented Lena, who was never over choice in the selection of an expression, "shouldn't wonder if some day the gov's fluffy little saint didn't have the whole thing over, and break her darned neck——."

"I am *obliged* for your good wishes, Miss Barton!"

The softly modulated voice came from behind, as Dorothy, who had just come on the stage, walked across to the dressing-room used in common by the two lady assistants.

Old Hendon chuckled.

"Oh, shut up, you old ass," muttered Lena, "listeners never hear much good of themselves anyhow," and she followed the affronted "fluffy little saint" into the dressing-room.

Dorothy, almost in tears, regained her self-control as her rival entered.

"Sorry, and all that kind of thing," Lena said, pitching her hat in a corner, and preparing to don the short close-fitting costume used for rehearsals: "I should keep an eye on that blooming glass anyway, you'd find it a bit heavy for a counterpane I fancy."

Dorothy did not reply for a few moments; then she said, "If it will support your weight—as I think it used to—I daresay it will continue to bear me all right."

Lena Barton's thin straight upper lip for a moment revealed the successful efforts of her dentist, to allay the ravages of a too rapidly lived existence of thirty years or so. For an instant her leady grey eyes blazed, and she was about to hurl an invective at her companion, when a tap at the door silenced her.

"Are you ready, ladies?" enquired the cheerful voice of De Ceps.

"Ready in half a mo," came the answer in Lena's jerky tones, and the two women came quietly on the stage going through the rehearsal as though nothing had happened to ruffle the temper of either.

Lena Barton quickly cleared off with the bulgy comedian in a motor, immediately after the rehearsal, and as De Ceps and Dorothy were about to also depart, old Hendon accosted his employer.

"That there mirror of ours, for the 'Vanity Fair' business, ain't as steady as it might be," he ventured;—but Dorothy interposed: "Oh, that's all right, Hendon, don't worry about that please—now."

De Ceps, always keen on the subject of his apparatus, would have listened to more, but Dorothy hurried him out. "Take me for a stroll round," she said, "I don't want to hear any more about illusions and things just now; look what a lovely morning it is, we've had enough of the musty stage,"—and then, as De Ceps looked rather askance at her, she continued with a smile, "that is only until to-night, *mon cher*."

De Ceps was in love, and yielded. "I don't like the idea of your balancing yourself on that affair if it 'wobbles,'" he replied, "I would rather ——"

But Dorothy was petulant. "Oh, please talk of something else just now," she said, and so—they strolled out and—talked of the other little things.

De Ceps' entertainment had gone with a swing during the week, and Dorothy had no further passage-of-arms with Lena Barton. The lessee of the theatre had brightened up at the increase of receipts, and, full of hopes for the future, had booked De Ceps' show for an early return. On the Saturday night a crowded house, who had expectantly waited for the turn—which preceded the last—applauded and cheered as De Ceps walked down to the footlights with a shade of annoyance across his usually happy-go-lucky "French" countenance.

Ten minutes before, the stage door-keeper had seen Lena Barton leave the building with the aforementioned comedian. She had also left a note for De Ceps.

"Sorry to clear out so sudden" it read—"am off with Tom Vorin by the express for town—couldn't wait for the show;" the letter was not signed.

There was nothing for it but to go through the performance without her, so the exasperated conjurer had the curtain rung up.

"Ladees and gentlemen," he announced in his beautifully assumed broken English, "I am verray

sorry to have to say to you that one young lady of my company is to-night not so well," here he stopped for the laugh that rang through the house. "That ees, I mean," he continued, "she is what you say indisposed. I haf another young lady——" a pause and more hilarity on the part of the audience, "and she with me, will shew you all the illusions but one. I crave your pardon, ladies and gentlemen, we will do our beest—pardon, best."

One of the assistants pushed away the cabinet in which it had been the delinquent's duty to make an appearance, and quickly undoing the stage screws that held the "Vanity Fair" mirror, dragged that heavy piece of apparatus to another position. It did not look over steady, but the curtain was up and the show had to go on.

"Be careful," whispered De Ceps to Dorothy as the last illusion became due, "slip through the hole in the mirror the instant I get the screen round you. We've had to set the thing by the O.P. panel." Then he wheeled round to the audience again with a smile. "You see here, ladies and gentlemen, a large mirror, without any holes or any—anything except the the—looking glass. This lady," pointing to the smiling Dorothy, "will stand on the leetle platform which you see, and then you will see—what you will see.

The audience laughed. Most of them had seen the trick before, and although quite ignorant of the *modus operandi*, were pretty well aware of what was intended to happen.

The conjurer's daughter lightly tripped up the steps on the front of the illusion, and landing on the platform was instantly covered by a screen.

De Ceps held above his head a pistol; "Vun, Two," he counted.

Suddenly without warning the huge mirror fell forward and crashed to the floor, half burying the unfortunate assistant.

An agonised shriek pierced the horror stricken audience and the curtain quickly dropped.

There was a tumult for a moment, one woman fainted, as usual, and some folk started making for the exits.

Then the rather bewildered manager of the theatre made his appearance, and holding up his hand for silence addressed the audience. "Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I am pleased to inform you that Miss Claydon, the young lady who met with the accident, is not seriously hurt. She has been somewhat cut with the broken glass and is suffering from shock, but is otherwise uninjured. I should be glad if you would retain your seats for the last item of our programme, when perhaps Monsieur De Ceps will address you."

Behind the scenes William Tregoan, to revert to his real name, in a state of pitiable anxiety, was awaiting the verdict of a doctor and a medical student, who had rushed round from the front of the house, immediately after the catastrophe.

Old Hendon, with reddened eyes, stood by holding in his hand two broken bolts. "See this, governer!" he said in an agitated voice, as with shaking hand he offered one of the screws for De Cep's inspection.

The conjurer waved him aside. "Yes, he said, "I ought to have attended to it. Oh Heavens! if my Dorothy should die."

"But you don't see, continued the old man vociferously, "these bolts have been nearly cut through with a hack saw."

"Cut through!" replied the dazed conjurer. "Cut through," he reiterated, seizing the screws, "What devil in human form—"

"Devil is about the right name, governor," gasped old Hendon, "call it Lena Barton—*that's* why she's gone!"

Here the two doctors put in an appearance. "Cheer up, old chap," said the younger, "broken her collar bone, cuts, and shock—all right in a month; go in, she's asking for you."

With murmured thanks, the magician grasped each by the hand, and then tore across to the dressing-room. On the floor lay Dorothy bandaged and helpless, but with a smile for De Ceps.

"Gov." she said, "I'm afraid I shan't be much use for your line now. I can't think how it happened."

De Ceps could, and he momentarily ground his teeth, but it was not the time for explanations.

"It's all right, Dorothy dear," he said at length, summoning a smile, "the doctor's say you are all right, buck up, little girl."

A tear slowly stole down the girl's pale cheek.

"Do you think you will still be able to do with me, if—that is, when I get better, you see there's mother and——"

De Ceps bent over the stricken girl and kissed her on the forehead. "Do with you? my dear little girl!" he said. "Listen," "that's the last turn, Dorothy, a jolly good tenor too, can you hear him? He is singing what I want to say now, what I shall always say if you will let me?"

"And Dorothy, with a little contented sigh, laid her hand on the conjurer's, as into the murky dressing-room were wafted the singer's closing lines,

"I only know I love you,
Love me and the world is mine."

THE END.

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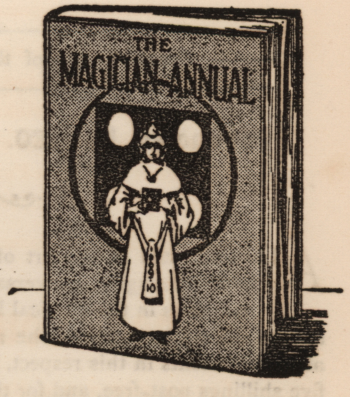

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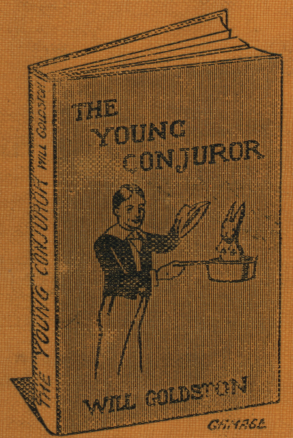

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